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ABSTRACT

This is a general evaluation and description of a museum for children ages two through 12 that was begun by a group of citizens in Denver, Colorado. The evaluation shows that the museum is serving the community successfully and has met its broad goal of giving children an opportunity to develop positive self-concepts and to grow cognitively through manipulation of a responsive environment. The museum has developed high involvement activities that need low supervision. The activities have been most successful with children ages three through eight. In an ethnic kitchen children learn to measure ingredients, churn butter, and use similar ingredients to produce a variety of breads from different cultures. They are involved in role play and language development through the use of hand puppets and a grandmother's attic exhibit. Other exhibits include a stream table, where children build terraces and dams, and a wildlife exhibit of stuffed animals, which allows the children to touch and feel the animals that live in Colorado. Children play games on a computer terminal, look at familiar objects with microscopes, and "see their voice" with oscilloscopes. The museum schedules time for Denver public school students to visit the exhibits and, through its outreach program, places exhibits in places such as Day Care and Head Start centers for a week or two at a time. The museum serves as a training facility for people interested in pursuing child development as a career by working with education departments of nearby universities and with high school students. It also offers parenting workshops. (Author/RM)

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A Museum For Children
Final Report
HEW OCD Grant 90-C-85 For Years
1973 - 1976

A Museum For Children was begun by a group of citizens who felt that there was a need for children in Denver to have a participatory learning experience.

Details on the Museums history exhibits and evaluations of Exhibits have been fully discussed and may be found in the final reports for 1973 - 1974 and 1974 - 1975. The objectives of the project were:

1. To explore on a comprehensive basis whether a Childrens Museum would be feasible for Denver and the Rocky Mountain Region.
2. To test the effectiveness of various exhibits in different areas of the city so that differing socio-economic populations including handicapped children would be sampled.
3. To determine whether community support existed for the permanent establishment of a Children's Museum.
4. To give children an opportunity to develop positive self-concepts and to grow cognitively through manipulation of a responsive environment.
5. To develop a model for a Children's Museum that would reflect the educational needs of the Rocky Mountain region.

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A series of exhibits was constructed in the summer of 1973 and taken to 6 different locations. An estimated 8,000 children visited the exhibits. In 1974 a second series of exhibits toured a variety of neigh-

borhoods and nearly 30,000 people experienced them. This response from the community convinced the Museum's Board of Directors that there was indeed a need for a permanent Children's Museum.

The Board chose an inner city location to house the Museum. A grant from a local foundation covered the cost of renovating a warehouse of 10,140 square feet. The Museum opened January 25, 1975.

Broad objectives of this third project year were to design and create exhibits and programs which would provide an awareness of self, of the natural world around us, and of the impact that the concepts of self and nature have had on the world that man has created.

The Museum's goals for this project period were:

1. To establish and construct a changing interpretative exhibit area that would provide children with the elements to understand themselves and the natural or man-made environment that they are part of.
2. To establish workshops for children and parents that provide a more intensive investigation of the themes of self and the environment whether it be natural or man-made.
3. To establish within the Museum a Resource and Recycle Center for parents, teachers and others interested in child development that would provide recyclable materials and ideas.
4. To establish within the Museum a Performance Center where the children participating would be the principle communicators of a changing series of programs.
5. To establish the museum as a training center for early childhood development personnel. Such as Head Start, day care, preschool and elementary students or teachers.

The hours from 10:00 - 2:00 Tuesday through Friday were reserved for groups from elementary schools, day care centers, Head Start centers, pre-schools and other organized groups. The public hours for families were from 2:00 - 5:00 Tuesday thru Friday, 10:00 - 5:00 on Saturdays and 2:00 - 5:00 on Sundays.

The Museum Staff consisted of a Director, Administrative Assistant, Exhibits Curator, Program Cordinator, Community Cordinator, Part-Time Assistant, Part-Time Secretary, Part-Time Janitor and two Part-Time people who supervised the Museum floor on weekends.

During the six month period from January 1, 1976 through June 30, 1976, 18,105 children visited the Museum during the reserved hours. The composition of the groups is as follows:

Day Care	372
Handicapped	167
Special Education	155
Public Elementary Schools & Head Start	13,769
Private Elementary Schools	357
Private Pre-School	3,285

During its first year in its permanent location, community response to the Museum remained overwhelming. Groups reserved times months in advance, and we were unable to accomodate all who wanted to come. Children visiting the Museum took great delight in the exhibits.

Exhibits related to three theme areas of Self, Nature and Technology.

In the self area, children used color sense cubes to experience the sensation of color, their reaction to it and the use of all of their tactile senses in the identification of objects in each cube.

Ethnic Kitchen - since the kitchen is the prime activity center of a home, this exhibit reporduces ethnic kitchens near the turn of the century. Children learned to measure ingredients, to churn butter and to use similar ingredients to produce a variety of breads from different cultures.

Exhibits in the self-area are multi-cultural to provide children with a reference point to show their personal heritage as a means of improving their self-images through positive socialization.

An Indian tee-pee was built for the exhibits floor by a native American. Reporductions of Indian utensils, drums and artifacts are used.

Signs on the exhibits floor appear in Spanish as well as English. The Museum's newsletter is also bi-lingual.

Role-playing and language development through the use of hand puppets and a Grandmother's Attic exhibit. The attic consists of turn-of-the-century clothes and furniture. Children engage in role-playing by dressing up in clothes such as doctors and nurses uniforms and firemans uniforms.

Examples of exhibits in the nature theme area include a stream table where children can build terraces and dams as a method of gaining an understanding of one aspect of ecology and how man influences the enviornment.

Live animals such as snakes and an ant habitat provide children with the opportunity to watch the colony at work and as a home. A wild-life exhibit of stuffed animals allows the children to touch and feel the animals that live in Colorado.

A variety of constantly changing art and craft experiences are available. These include easels, zootropes, clay, dilution trays, and make-up.

Technology exhibits include a computer terminal that has been programmed with games and activities that demonstrate the characteristics of this mondern tool as the children interact with it and also provide some identification with self as the children make decisions in response to the computer program.

Calculators, microscopes to look at familiar objects with a different perspective and an oscilloscope which enables the children to "see their voices" are very popular exhibits.

Exhibits that do not have a specific objective that can be evaluated have been removed from the exhibit floor - we have learned that we need more high involvement - low supervision activities to minimize the numbers of staff and volunteer adults needed on the exhibits floor.

Summer workshops for this project year relate to and supplement themes that the exhibits follow. For a complete schedule, see Appendixes A and B.

Some of these have been done in target area neighborhoods in cooperation with the Denver Public Library. Others are done at the Museum.

A Community Coordinator was hired in September of 1975 along with her part time assistant. Her specific role was to establish an outreach program for the Museum.

This program focused on clusters of Day Care Mothers, Day Care and Head Start Centers. Exhibits were taken out to these facilities and left for a week to two. The Community Coordinator then scheduled these groups to come to the Museum for visits and workshops. Almost 2,000 Head Start children visited the Museum this year. The Museum received many letters from day care mothers in praise of its program, workshops and exhibits.

The Performance Center or Imagination Playhouse offered a variety of personal involvement experiences including magic shows, puppet shows and participatory theatre. These were very well attended and, again, we could not accomodate all the people who wanted to participate. They were successful in that the children themselves could become the per-

formers.

The performance center is being directed by a staff member experienced in producing children's programs. A variety of groups will perform throughout the year, enabling children to experience the theater in its diverse forms.

The Resource and Recycle Center demonstrates the practicality of recycling materials and encourages the self aspects of imagination, creativity, and originality of each person using this facility.

Workshops on the use of recyclable materials as educational tools were held throughout the year both at the Museum and out in the community. They were extremely well received by day care mothers and Head Start teachers who were able to purchase grocery sacks full of materials at a very low cost and then use them with their children to create useful objects and educational tools. Workshops in the use of tri-wall were very successful. Those attending learned to make easels, doll cradles, doll houses and puppet theatres from tri-wall.

Activity sheets of ideas on the use of these materials were provided.

The Museum offers the use of a library of books to supplement the workshops on recyclable materials.

The Museum continues to work with Metropolitan area public schools. The Scheduling groups who visit the Museum is done so that Majority Anglo children and Minority children are paired. Close observation is undertaken at these times. The children invariably interract in a natural way because the Museum atmosphere is condusive to spontaneous interaction. Once they enter the exhibit area, children may go in whatever direction they wish and almost never stay with their own groups.

Teachers are given a brief orientation so that they will be comfortable with this lack of structure and will not try to keep the children together or with a partner.

In an effort to make the Museum a training facility for people interested in pursuing childdevelopment as a career, the museum works with high school students, student teachers from the University of Colorado at Boulder and child development and education majors from Metro State College who are assigned to the Museum as part of their course of study throughout the year.

In addition, the Museum offered a parenting workshop to interested community members.

Because the "broad goals" for this project (as outlines in the 1975-76 proposal) were unsubstantiated by specific objectives, this is a general evaluation.

The Museum has been perhaps too ambitious in its claim to serve children from ages 2 through 12. It is probably most successful in reaching children from ages 3 through 8. Observation has indicated that children over 8 are interested mainly in the computer terminal. The Museum has re-defined the population that it serves on the exhibit floor, but workshops are available for children through age 12.

The number of children on the exhibit floor at any one time is limited to about 80 so that the experience is enjoyable and not frenetic.

Recommendations:

Long range planning is valuable. It prevents a Museum from taking on programs for which it isn't ready. We learned that we were perhaps trying to do too many programs and that our growth has been too rapid.

Administrative problems began with the resignation in September of

the Museum's Director. A temporary Director was hired until a new Director was found in the spring of 1976. It is important that a Board of Directors communicate its philosophy clearly to the Museum Director before he or she is hired.

During the transitional period, it became apparent that some staff members were not qualified in the positions for which they were hired. This resulted in some turn-over. It is recommended that a Museum with a small staff include people with a variety of skills. Traditional Museum positions such as Exhibit Curator are inappropriate for a participatory Museum. Exhibits should be designed by many people rather than one permanent staff person so that they will reflect different perspections and different cultures.

Exhibits must have specific objectives so that they may be evaluated. There should be a schedule of changing exhibits and a systematic rotation of exhibits.

Despite the administrative confusion, the museum was able to continue to function so that it served the community successfully and met the broad goals as outlined in the project proposal for 1975-1976.

The Museum's original goal of including people of all ages, ethnic groups and classes in its planning has been achieved. The Staff, Board of Directors and Volunteers include a wide variety of people working together to achieve the common goal of A Museum For Children.

Appendices

A. 1975 Workshop Schedule

B. 1976 Workshop Schedule

C. Evaluations of Workshops

D. Richard Steckel's resume